

**DRUGS & MEDIA: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNICATION,
CONSUMPTION, AND CONSCIOUSNESS, ROBERT C. MACDOUGALL
(ED.) (2011)**

New York: Continuum, 368 pp.,
ISBN: 9781441134929, p/bk, \$42.95

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Drugs are all around us. There are drugs that we take for specific ailments, such as hydrocodone for pain management after a surgery or ibuprofen for a headache, and those deemed maintenance drugs, such as medication that regulates chronic high blood pressure or anti-rejection medication after an organ transplant. There are some substances that are so common that we do not even see them as drugs, such as the caffeine in coffee, and those that have become a part of socialization, such as alcohol. Of course, when most people think of drugs, they think of illegal drugs, such as marijuana or cocaine, but even these have a long history, and attitudes towards these substances shift with the social mores of the day. In short, 'drugs' is a complicated topic, and it is refreshing to see a volume like this that engages the topic in all of its complexity. With fifteen chapters in the book, a detailed discussion of each is beyond the scope of a brief book review, but there are several themes that emerged among the chapters.

First, there is the question of what drugs have to do with media, and the authors in this volume explore this relationship from several angles. Some of the authors, such as Lance Strate, consider how drugs function as media themselves, suggesting that 'as media, drugs are a means by which we extend ourselves into ourselves; they are extensions of the system that become intrusions back into the system' (28), and Corey Anton, who uses McLuhan's classification of hot and cool media to make a distinction between 'loose' drugs, which loosen our grasp on normal consciousness, and 'tight' drugs, which 'attempt to mediate without being experienced' (43). Along these lines are chapters that explore how drugs change our relationship with our bodies, such as Valerie Peterson's chapter on birth control and erectile dysfunction (ED) medication and Robert MacDougall's chapter on ED drugs.

Next, there are the chapters that focus on the media about drugs. These chapters illustrate why such phenomena as direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertising and drug representatives who make the rounds to doctor's offices peddling the newest offerings are fraught with controversy. While the chapters by Jonah Bossewitch and Cristina Hanganu-Bresch focus on specific issues (paediatric bipolar diagnosis and Prozac, respectively), the chapters by Phil Rose, Ainsley Moore and Brecken Chinn Schwartz consider the entire creation and distribution system of drugs. Taken together, these chapters illustrate that one cannot remove the drug from the culture in which it resides. There are societal issues to consider, legal and regulatory considerations and an entire advertising apparatus that often, as Schwartz suggests, feeds us a steady stream of media 'junk food'. Those with a rhetorical background will also appreciate Hanganu-Bresch's and Brett Robinson's humanistic approaches to closely examining these advertisements.

The final chapters of this volume consider what drugs can teach us about communication, or, as MacDougall puts it, they exhibit a 'psychopharmacological approach'. For example, Ronan Hallowell explores how such psychoactive drugs as ayahuasca can encourage outside of the box thinking. John Skinnon takes a decidedly scientific approach, examining the physiology of how drugs affect the body. Despite the molecular diagrams, Skinnon's chapter proves to be quite engaging even for non-pharmacists. MacDougall closes the book with a pair of chapters that explore how drugs are affecting not only the human body but also society as a whole. Indeed, in the third section of the book overall, the authors draw on an overarching theme of the book: how drugs illustrate the limitations of our own knowledge of human consciousness.

Like any volume, there are weaknesses and blind spots, and this one is no different. One issue I found is that several of the authors tended to become bogged down in history and supporting literature. This may stem from the impulse to heavily bolster one's claims when such claims go against the conventional wisdom, so this is understandable. Another issue is that the volume focuses heavily on drugs that affect the mind; I would have liked to see, also, more attention paid to drugs that affect the body. There is some of this, such as Peterson's and MacDougall's chapters, but there are a host of 'tight' drugs, to use Anton's formulation, such as vaccines and insulin, that have significant implications for how we view the relationship between drugs and the body. Although they are not as sensational as many of the drugs examined in this volume, some of these seemingly mundane drugs have had significant impacts on human society (for example, consider how much different society would be without the polio vaccine). It seems that closely examining these everyday drugs would likely reveal significant insights.

Still, even with these limitations, this is an excellent volume that avoids much of the moralizing often found in discussions surrounding drugs. Another strength of this volume is the interdisciplinary nature of the contributors, in both their approaches to the topic and the disciplines in which they reside. Traditional media and communication scholars are juxtaposed with those from pharmacy and public health. Indeed, this interdisciplinary approach is a hallmark of media ecology scholarship, and the volume is much stronger for it. Overall, this is a thought-provoking work that would be of interest to a wide range of fields, including communication and media studies, public health, psychology and medicine.

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